GHANA

Recent Excavations of Adansemanso

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In the spring of 1995 the site of Adansemanso was the focus for the final season of the Asante Archaeological Research Project under the direction of Prof. Peter Shinnie. Over the course of a four month field season (January to April) a team of students from the University of Calgary and local labourers were involved in clearing, mapping and excavating across the site.

Situated approximately 30 km south of Kumasi, the location of Adansemanso initially became known to us (Asante Archaeological Research Project) in 1991, when we conducted a three week preliminary survey of the site (Shinnie and Vivian 1991). At that time, results of a surface survey and test excavations lead us to conclude that a sizable settlement existed, possibly dating to before the sixteenth century. This appeared to conform with the many oral and historical accounts (e.g., Wilks 1982:235, 1994:659) which list Adansemanso as one of the five original great towns or capitals of the early Akan kingdoms. Certainly many oral traditions of the Asante and other Akan groups claim the Adanse/Amansie region to be the original home of the Akan people. To this day local inhabitants maintain a shrine which reputedly marks the sacred center of the site of Adansemanso.

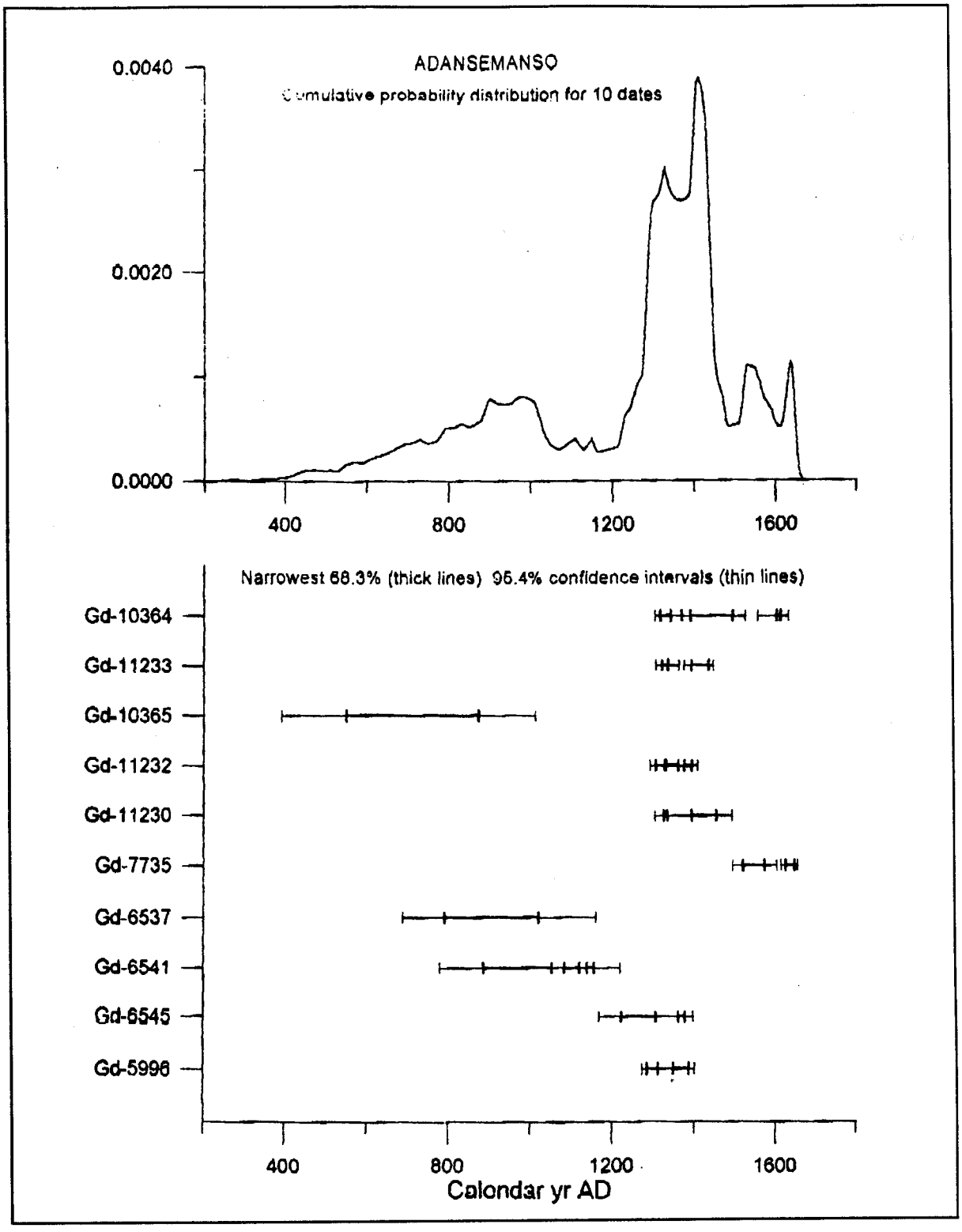
Further funding was finally secured to continue with research into the nature of this site and the emergence of the Asante Kingdom. During the 1995 field season emphasis was placed on clearing as much of the central area of the site as possible, establishing the age of the settlement, and producing a detailed surface map. Examinations of available surface exposures suggest that the center of the settlement exceeds 11 hectares in size. Excavations ranging from 2 x 2 m units to larger 2 x 10 m trenches were carried out across the site. The distribution of these excavations was planned in such a way as to collect samples of ceramics and datable material from different parts of the site, in addition to elucidating the nature of the cultural deposits (which ranged from generally shallow covering layers, to deeper midden deposits, and substantial architectural fill). A total of twelve different units, represent a combined total of 119 m^2, were excavated during the 1995 field season.

Particular emphasis was placed on examining the series of long linear mounds which were identified during exploratory surveys in 1991. It was only after much of the central site area (which is actively farmed or lies in fallow) was cleared that the size and overall extent of these mounds became clear. These mounds, which tend to be approx. 5 m across, and range in length from 60 to more than 100 m long, are unlike anything previously reported in Ghana. The identification of cultural features, including numerous clay lined pits and several clearly demarcated floors, confirmed that most of these mounds are the remnants of architectural structures. Surface mapping of these was carried out at intervals between 1 and 2 m, on a 5 m grid. A more complete analysis of these mounds and structural changes in Asante architecture was reported at the recent SAfA meetings in Poznan (Vivian 1996).

The size and layout of these mounds is indicative of a large and complex settlement. Yet the contemporaneity of the various constructions remains a concern. For this reason, carbon samples were sought from across the site and also selected from different sections of the same mounds. A total of 11 carbon samples were submitted to the Institute of Physics Radiocarbon Laboratory of the Silesian Technical University, in Gliwice, Poland. This brings the total number of dated samples from the site to sixteen, of which ten could be calibrated within the range established by Dr. Pazdur (1996; see Table 1). Results firmly place the main occupation of the site between the 13th and 15th centuries A.D (Figure 1).

The general lack of imported materials from across the site appears to confirm these dates. Excavations have revealed fragments of only three indigenous pipes, and one imported kaolin pipe. This number stands in sharp contrast to nearby 18th and 19th century sites, where locally produced and imported pipe fragments are found to be commonplace (Shinnie and Vivian 1991). Only two, small imported sherds were found; one a sherd from a plain earthenware wheel turned vessel; the second a small

Figure 1: Adansemanso: Cumulative probability distribution for 10 dates.



red earthenware sherd with a solid blue tin glaze. Such solid blue tin-glazed vessels generally date to the 15th and early 16th centuries (Jamieson 1996).

In 1991 we also reported on a pit feature which we thought was possibly an iron smelting furnace (due to the concentration of iron slag found within it, and the close parallel to an earlier description of a furnace found in the area). The discovery of three similar features appears to dispel the notion that these pits are related to iron working. All of these features are characterized by slightly bell-shaped pits, approximately 2 m in depth. The upper portions of the pits are usually clay lined; and the one distinguishing feature common to all of them is that in the lower portions a single large pot was found. These pots are almost always near complete (only missing the base), and obviously intentionally placed in the pit, in some cases along with a number of fist sized cobbles. An explanation as to what these features actually were has eluded us.

While the existence of an iron furnace has been refuted by our further work, evidence of iron working is common. Pieces of iron slag are commonly found across the site surface. The common occurrence of iron slag in combination with the background noise of lateritic pebbles negated our attempts to locate a smelting furnace with a metal detector. The discovery of three crucibles represents other metallurgical skills. Proper trace element analysis should confirm whether these were for smelting gold, bronze or some other metal. Two brass cast geometric gold weights suggest gold weighing and trading activities were taking place. Two formed cubes, similar to those Garrard (1980: 179) refers to as strike stones, are also thought to be associated with the gold trade.

We are cautious in reporting that a small globule of solidified glass found may be indicative of molten glass working. This is particularly noteworthy, in that local glass production has historically relied on powder glass technologies. To this day the distinctive powder glass beads produced in this way can be commonly found throughout Ghana. Unfortunately this single find does not preclude the fact that such a concentration of silicates may have been brought about by metallurgical founding or smithing activities. While such activities could potentially result in concentrations of silicates, this rarely if ever has been reported. Until more evidence is forthcoming, the local development of molten glass technologies must remain tentative and subject to further investigation.

In sum, the findings from the site of Adansemanso indicate that a significant level of cultural complexity was attained within the central forest region of Ghana 2-3 centuries earlier than previously thought. Prior to these excavations, researchers have generally accepted that the Akan states first emerged and developed on the northern forest fringes, at sites such as Begho and Bono Manso. These new finds support the view that the complex organizations of the Akan forest states emerged concurrently with the forest fringe states. Such findings indicate that models of local state development have to be revised, and that much work remains to be done within the central forest region before we can fully understand the emergence of the Akan states.

Acknowledgments

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Table 1: List of dates from Adansemanso.

1991 Date Series **Sample No.**	**Lab reference No.**	**Date**
C210	Gd-5996 confidence level - 68.04% [1350 AD, 1388 AD] 36.97 % [1285 AD, 1313 AD] 31.07%	680 ± 50 yr. BP confidence level - 95.63% [1273 AD, 1401 AD] 95.63%
C214	Gd-6545 confidence level - 68.09% [1362 AD, 1378 AD] 7.23% [1223 AD, 1307 AD] 60.86%	740 ± 70 yr. BP confidence level - 95.59% [1168 AD, 1398 AD] 95.59%
C227	Gd-6541 confidence level - 68.29% [1139 AD, 1156 AD] 4.13% [1084 AD, 1121 AD] 8.70% [886 AD, 1053 AD] 55.45%	1050 ± 100 yr. BP confidence level - 95.67% [778 AD, 1219 AD] 95.67%
C234	Gd-6537 confidence level - 69.10% [790 AD, 1021 AD] 69.10%	1110 ± 110 yr. BP confidence level - 95.66% [687 AD, 1160 AD] 95.66%
C210	Gd-6540 date outside of calibration range	310 ± 70 yr. BP
1995 Date Series **Sample No.**	**Lab Reference No.**	**Date**
AD 7/95	Gd-7735 confidence level - 68.07% [1626 AD, 1648 AD] 20.06% [1520 AD, 1574 AD] 48.01%	310 ± 30 yr. BP confidence level - 95.51% [1614 AD, 1655 AD] 27.22% [1494 AD, 1604 AD] 68.29%
AD 8/95	Gd-11230 confidence level - 68.19% [1395 AD, 1455 AD] 63.55% [1326 AD, 1335 AD] 4.64%	510 ± 60 yr. BP confidence level - 94.50% [1304 AD, 1493 AD] 94.50%

Table 1: List of dates from Adansemanso. *(continued)*

AD 9/95	Gd-11232 confidence level - 68.22% [1377 AD, 1396 AD] 18.12% [1331 AD, 1362 AD] 29.09%	620 ± 50 yr BP confidence level - 95.16% [1293 AD, 1409 AD] 95.16%
AD 14/95	Gd-10365 confidence level - 68.39% [552 AD, 873 AD] 68.39%	1360 ± 160 yr. BP confidence level - 95.41% [393 AD, 1012 AD] 95.41%
AD 15/95	Gd-11233 confidence level - 68.33% [1394 AD, 1437 AD] 56.98% [1323 AD, 1337 AD] 11.34%	540 ± 50 yr. BP confidence level - 95.16% [1376 AD, 1447 AD] 66.85% [1307 AD, 1363 AD] 28.30%
AD 16/95	Gd-10364 confidence level - 68.23% [1604 AD, 1613 AD] 2.58% [1392 AD, 1496 AD] 58.08 % [1318 AD, 1343 AD] 7.57%	490 ± 80 yr. BP confidence level - 95.16% [1556 AD, 1632 AD] 13.64% [1371 AD, 1526 AD] 67.27% [1305 AD, 1369 AD] 14.26%
AD 6/95	Gd-10360 date outside of calibration range	430 ± 90 yr. BP
AD 10/95	Gd-9533 date outside of calibration range	580 ± 160 yr. BP
AD 11/95	Gd-10366 date outside of calibration range	530 ± 150 yr. BP
AD 12/95	Gd-10362	modern
AD 13/95	Gd-10363 date outside of calibration range	100 ± 150 yr. BP